

AUGUST 7, 1980

By now you are certain to have heard that cattle numbers are up four percent over a year ago. The news was particularly distressing for Shortgrass operators. The increase put us 104 percent above carrying capacity compared to grass for the summer season. Other than a slight improvement in our collateral position, we needed more cattle about as much as we needed one more hot day.

Cattle prices went up the same week the report was released. I suppose that if the inside of the earth's crust were to catch fire, the cow herders would be the first ones to run to the barn for a shovel to start trailing the smoke. I feel certain that every cattle buyer from the jungles of the Isthmus of Panama to Northern Alaska started harping on the increase within 20 seconds after it was on the wire, yet somewhere within this mysterious game, feeders and fats rose in price.

One thing that's clear, the Shortgrass Country can't be blamed for an increase in anything except maybe dry weather. We were dry enough last July to cause a camel caravan to detour into Mexico to keep from crossing us. Spring was so short that the songbirds went farther north without finishing building the framework for their nests. Other birdlife became so scarce by June that the utility companies were asking the state to make woodpeckers an endangered species. Without the downies and the redheads to peck holes in the poles, the highline boys learned that the dry posts were splitting from a lack of ventilation.

With all its faults, I am not going to be tricked into moving from my homeland. You better check these wonderlands out that go around claiming their citizens don't have any head pains is because they have some other trouble that's so bad that they overlook their teeth falling from their head.

I don't trust people that say they never had a headache or woke up with stiff neck. Seals that aren't auditioned for a circus act never drop a ball, either. In times like these a headache is a symbol of success. Once a fellow becomes immune to those pains, he'd chalked so much red that his temples are numb.

The first thing I'm going to do is to run a strict audit of the cattle numbers at the ranch. I sure don't want an extra four percent to feed next winter. Feed dealers are already whetting their augers for the coming season. Be just my luck for the count to come up long.